

2 Ethnicity as a Death-Trap: the History of Gypsy Studies¹

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A HISTORICAL SONDERWEG

For a long time we have wondered why the findings of research into Gypsy groups have so rarely been the subject of scholarly debate in the field of historical studies on migration, settlement and ethnicity. Why do new insights on Gypsies and other itinerant groups so seldom reach the academic curriculum or become part of public understanding? There seems to be a *communis opinio* about who they are and where they come from, while at the same time little substantial knowledge about their past exists as such. It is even possible to put forward the proposition that the traditionally negative view of Gypsies may drag on without end because of the splendid isolation in which Gypsy studies have come to be placed. Another factor is that by focusing exclusively on the group level instead of on interactions with the surrounding society and on comparisons with other groups in the same socio-economic position, our historical knowledge of the functioning of Gypsies has remained one-sided.

In a recent article the linguist Anthony P. Grant came to the generally accepted but very pretentious conclusion: 'As Grellmann pointed out over two centuries ago, the history of the Romá is to be found in their language.'² It is a pity that this point of departure is still accepted, for we think that the consequence of this approach has been that our entrance into the history of Gypsy groups in Europe has been seriously blocked, for more than 200 years already. The study of language as an indicator of the origins of a people has led to many speculations. Because of their strong determination to designate a country of origin, scholars have not paused to reflect sufficiently on a number of questions which from a historical point of view are equally interesting, for example the reasons for the departure of so-called Gypsy groups from central and northwest India or elsewhere in the world, or their socio-economic

functioning and cultural background in the respective countries into which they migrated. We also do not know what kind of relations these people, who lived everywhere in disparate circumstances, maintained with each other over time. It is impossible to comprehend how linguistics will ever be able to give conclusive answers to all such questions which directly concern the historical reconstruction of the Gypsies' ups and downs. Besides that, the criterion of language is utterly inadequate to clarify why people were (or still are) defined as Gypsies.

Ethnologists and folklorists have also blocked our way into the history of Gypsy groups, by focusing solely on their ethnic identity. As a result their fortunes were isolated from the national histories of the countries where they lived. In the academic field they received a kind of *Sonderbehandlung*, as the Nazis called it. They were – and still are – looked upon as one people, dispersed over the world. It is true that in the 1970s social scientists like Acton and Salo had already pointed out that we encounter a variety of ethnic groups behind the label 'Gypsy' and they even warned against a rigid ethnocentric point of view.³ Following in the footsteps of the linguists and authors who focused on the origin of the migrants who left India, most scholars in the field of Gypsy studies have, however, continued to look for common features, which they then interpret in terms of ethnic or cultural background.

What we also observe is that the overall idea exists that Gypsies in Europe have only met rejection and discrimination, and have been persecuted and victimized up to the present day. It remains, however, an open question whether the 'Gypsy category' actually was the source of much specific trouble and was felt to be unusually oppressive.⁴ There are no empirical studies available to settle the matter and the publications which do exist are characterized by an almost exclusive reliance on official judicial sources. As a result the one-dimensional picture has come into being that historically Gypsies have only known persecution and marginalization. In contemporary socio-historical research at any rate they only make the scene in a context of poverty, mendacity, vagabondage, marginality and criminality.⁵ No one seems to doubt that in their case it was aimless vagrants whose criminal or asocial behaviour impelled the authorities to take cruel suppressive measures. Publications dealing exclusively with Gypsies do not arrive at an essentially different interpretation, except that in these we encounter the practically obligatory observation that governments or chroniclers were afflicted

with the prejudices of their time. Nevertheless authors put their trust in these texts and refer to the lack of tolerance since the sixteenth century because the Gypsies, as (camouflaged) beggars and criminals, are purported to have been a nuisance to the population. Through this selection of sources information that points to the integration of Gypsies is consistently ignored or played down – the musical tradition which in several countries they were able to build up, the prosperity which some groups of horse traders achieved, their occasionally being absorbed as a matter of due course into the ranks of sedentary society and their marriages with indigenous peoples which explain the 'mixed population' in many countries. These are all indications of social integration, and for the success of such an interactive process, concessions are necessary from both sides, newcomers and long-standing inhabitants, which implies that Gypsy societies were less closed than is often assumed.

The most important cause for the failure of the historical picture to admit change is that most writers about Gypsies accept the premise that they constitute one people with a number of fixed characteristics.⁶ It is said that it is because of the specific nature of the Gypsy people that they always end up having difficulties and meet with rejection from others in the societies where they live. As a result of this point of view few researchers have an eye for the socio-economic and ethnic-cultural variety which is incorporated into the history of these groups. This fact is of primary importance, for authoritative scholarly texts in particular have played such a prominent role in the process of defining Gypsies and in the formation of ideas about their group character, certainly since the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Until then writers followed for the most part in the footsteps of the government and considered Gypsies as one of many categories of vagrants. For a long time they were thus more followers than leaders. A change in this situation occurred when a number of German authors 'proved' with great powers of persuasion that Gypsies are the descendants of an Indian caste of pariahs, with all the unfavourable traits which would belong to such ancestors. From then on governments and judicial authorities could legitimize their stigmatizing policy by invoking scientific arguments.

THE PAPER GYPSIES OF HEINRICH GRELLMANN

The book in which the thesis of one Gypsy people was elaborated for the first time was published in 1783 by the German historian Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann (1753–1804).⁷ It became quite a success in Germany as well as in England, France and the Netherlands. The influence of the book was and still is enormous. Reading the bibliography of Black on Gypsies (from 1913), with more than 4,000 titles, the eye of the reader is regularly confronted with the phrase 'based on (or derived from) Grellmann'. Almost every historical work on Gypsies in Europe takes Grellmann into account as a serious source, a unique ethnographical sketch, never outdated if we are to believe contemporary German and Austrian studies. Other illustrations of his influence are to be found in encyclopaedias. The whole scope of the work and the structure are still (partly) copied by contemporary writers on Gypsies. Grellmann set the tone for the following two centuries.

In the latest popular general overview, *The Gypsies* (1992), Angus Fraser concludes that Grellmann at the end of the eighteenth century restored the ethnic identity of Gypsies by revealing their origins through the means of examining their language.⁸ There are, however, also indications that it was far more a matter of his constructing a Gypsy identity which, as such, had not previously existed. What took place was not the historical retrieval of knowledge which had been lost, but the synthesis of different approaches and the creation of unity in ways of thinking about diverse population groups. Grellmann's generalizing conclusions were based on a collection of sources about dissimilar groups which, to his mind, had a number of traits in common. They were said to have differed from others in their surroundings by virtue of their (previous) itinerant way of life, their being 'foreigners' or of oriental descent and, wherever in the world they resided, their being devoid of religion – in short an image of mutually related, alien heathens who lived parasitic, highly mobile lives. They might be called by different names in different places, but Grellmann gathered them all under the label of 'Gypsies'. By so doing he made them into one people, endowed with a common ethnographic profile.

Grellmann derived his most important information from a series of articles about the lives and works of Gypsies in Hungary and Transylvania written by a Hungarian minister, Samuel Augustini ab Hortis.⁹ We do not know whether this minister had his own

observations to thank for his expertise. In any event his pronouncements were extrapolated by Grellmann to apply to all groups known to him from the literature which matched his idea of Gypsy characteristics. Thus there emerged the portrait of an ethnic group which he subsequently, by comparing lists of words from a parental language, *Romani*, provided with a surprising new land of origin, namely India. To what extent all the people whom he called 'Gypsies' had a command of *Romani* he had no idea. He was also in the dark about the reasons why they left their original homeland at the start of the fifteenth century. Yet he did not hesitate, making use of travellers' accounts, to point out parallels with the way of life of outcasts in Indian society. By carrying on in this way he provided all Gypsy groups with a common descent. He also constructed a national history by compiling every scrap of information about them which he could find in chronicles, cosmographies, theological tracts, legal documents and other such sources. So he believed he had penetrated to the essence of the Gypsy people.

Whoever holds up critically to the light the sources which Grellmann selected, as well as his work methods, detects, however, a deficiency of reliable empirical information, an approach which, in the last analysis, shows little originality, and a set of dubious presuppositions as well.¹⁰ Thus the early history of Gypsy studies discloses that retroactively an authority was conferred on texts in which during the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries gypsy-like groups were mentioned, an authority which these writings might perhaps never have enjoyed had not Grellmann and several of his predecessors compiled them and put them in order. In addition no consensus existed in the periods preceding him about the way in which Gypsies were defined. On one occasion they comprised one category in the midst of many kinds of vagrants; on another they were the degraded descendants of fifteenth-century pilgrims or the criminal allies of indigenous villains and imposters who, for opportunistic reasons, called themselves Gypsies. Some chronicles report their exceptional wealth, other tracts emphasize only their behaviour as social deviants. Epithets such as 'alien heathens', 'spies for the Ottoman enemy' or even 'pseudo-Jews' continued to be heard. In authoritative texts of the seventeenth century, in keeping with the perspective of the state, they were portrayed as a mixed population of (half) criminals, beggars and other 'lawless wastrels'. This definition in social terms came to an end with the appearance of Grellmann's book which introduced a categorization of Gypsies as

a *distinct people*. This approach caught on, with Grellmann's contemporaries and with later writers. A number of factors contributed to its success.

First of all there were current, timely motives for taking a scientific look at the origins of Gypsies; the subject hung, as it were, in the air. Grellmann was still a history student in those days and was possibly inspired to write an essay on the subject by a Swedish Academy essay competition during the 1770s. The reason that his paper grew and grew was the result of the coincidence that two of his teachers, August Schlözer and Christian Büttner, put their historical and linguistic sources at his disposal which made a more extensive analysis possible. While he was busy news reached him about the notorious Hungarian accusation in 1782 that Gypsies had practised cannibalism. The media covered the drawn-out yet dramatic trial which ensued in all its gory detail. Grellmann's book thus profited from a public appetite for knowing more about these 'heathen and uncivilized foreigners' who were fomenting the wildest fantasies. We should also not forget that most people at this time already had some notion of Gypsies who had for centuries been a favourite literary theme and part of an iconographic tradition. The literate public knew them as beautiful young women and terrifying witches, as magicians and agents from a magic realm, as highwaymen and exotic misfits. As figures in literature they created a sensation and in the plastic arts they tickled the imagination. Grellmann's book made people aware that these mythical representatives from some in-between world also existed in reality. The scientifically presented group portrait evidently dovetailed well into the prevailing picture. Herein fascination with and dread of Gypsies fought for supremacy and the assertion can be defended that this same ambivalence of feeling has continued down into the present.

What Grellmann's success with his book about these exotic groups of outsiders within one's own borders accomplished was that he welded together a number of scientific traditions. In addition to interest in the mysterious anti-world shadowland of vagabonds, beggars, criminals and other nonconformist denizens, a disposition to concentrate on the historical roots of one's own state dominated academic debate at the time. Enlightened historiographers in Germany combed chronicles and sources of other sorts which seemed likely to enable them to compile a reconstruction of their own, common past. In addition ethnographic interest increased in peoples about whom contemporary travellers who undertook expeditions

in different capacities to the far corners of the world published reports. Physical anthropology – the study of skulls and physiognomy – contributed its anatomical findings and Johann Gottfried von Herder introduced the concept of 'a people' as the expression of a *Nationalgeist*. This gave impetus to a grail-like search for the elemental foundations of the national past.¹¹ But the methods of arrangement and classification led inevitably to a hierarchy of peoples, values and ways of living within which the Gypsies were allocated a lowly position. Grellmann's assumption that Gypsy groups, wherever in the world they happened to be, all belonged to one people with an essentially immutable national spirit was wholly consistent with the principles formulated by von Herder.¹² That was equally true for the thought that language is an expression of all the people, which also explains why the link he made – following others – between the Gypsy language and Hindi prompted the conclusion that Gypsies came from India.

One people, one language, a homeland that was left behind long ago – the way in which Grellmann supplied a common ethnic base to Gypsy groups living scattered from each other by characterizing them extensively as a group with a static culture and way of life is familiar to us from popular West European conceptions about Jews in the diaspora. Indeed various authors before him had actually worked out the hypothesis that Gypsies were a group that had split off from the Jews.¹³ In a certain sense Grellmann joined ranks with this tradition by modelling his ideas about Gypsies on the accepted image of Jews. About both, one had the idea that a separate people was involved which lived as a state within the state, with their own morals and customs, a language of their own, an endogamous marriage pattern and an oriental appearance. On grounds of this origin they were said not to be assimilable, for in essence they always remained themselves and only appeared to adapt to their surroundings. This analogy underpinned Grellmann's notions about Gypsies as a distinct people. Only their language pointed the way to a different ethnic origin. Nonetheless the parallels continued to surface in various publications during the two centuries after him and in the Nazi era they were emphasized even more than ever.¹⁴

One last aspect which deserves mention in connection with the success of the first major work about Gypsies is that it matched with the political climate of the time. On a number of occasions Grellmann reported that he had been inspired by the guidelines for the civilizing of Gypsies (and other 'deviant groups') which the

Habsburg monarchs Maria Theresa and Joseph II had promulgated; accordingly he emerges as a policy researcher *avant la lettre*. He made no evaluation of the directives but acted like a loyal follower intent on providing scientific justification for what he praised as an enlightened government approach. Critics and other contemporaries praised him for his efforts and the university rewarded him with a professor's chair.

In this context there is an ambivalence which can be pointed out in Grellmann's thinking, the traces of which remain detectable all the way into the twentieth century. At the core of the Enlightenment is the thought that people are improvable which condones government policy directed towards this end. In such a perspective culture is presumed more potent than nature. Incompatible with this position was the Herderian idea of a people, a notion which was founded on the essence of a *Nationalgeist*, thus on a principle of exclusivity. What is essentially innate is by its very nature unchangeable. According to Grellmann, Gypsies, as Orientals, clung very tightly to their own norms and values which explained why they had been able to preserve their essence as a people for so many centuries. Yet he still thought it necessary that they be ruled with an iron hand so that they would obey the orders of Joseph II. This ideologically tinted belief in change contends for primacy in his book with his rational scepticism concerning the success of the undertaking. Such being of two minds is characteristic of general European thinking about Gypsies.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHANGE IN CATEGORIZING

Consulting written sources exclusively, Grellmann had constructed an ethnic homogeneity and a coherent picture of the history of the Gypsies. After him various writers moved among the people themselves and reported at length about their personal encounters and experiences. The question is whether, for example, the influential (literary) author George Borrow (1803-81),¹⁵ and in his wake the English and Austro-Hungarian folklorists, who contributed hundreds of articles to the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, increased the subtlety of the image of Gypsies through their observations. Did they leave the paper Gypsies behind them and come forward with trustworthy ethnographic articles?

First of all the leading men of the Gypsy Lore Society (founded in 1888)¹⁶ were responsible for a major shift in the categorizing. It appeared difficult for them to rhyme the reality which they discovered with the image handed down through the literature. Nevertheless, they did not challenge earlier authoritative texts, but began to differentiate among Gypsies and were soon convinced that the true Gypsies, as they knew them from the ethnographic sketches which had been published since their appearance in Europe, hardly existed any longer. Only here and there one met a solitary example of the ancient race, as Borrow called them, and such individuals therefore were a valuable source of information. These were the ones on whom researchers depended, for a price, to initiate them into the secrets of their 'vanishing people'. The problem was that this method did not altogether correspond with the prevailing image of Gypsies as people who were unwilling to reveal anything about their language or customs to non-Gypsies. This complaint about an inclination to secrecy was one already voiced by Grellmann and his predecessors. The new thing about Borrow and those who came after him was that they prided themselves on having demolished the wall of suspicion. Thus on paper they created the romantic image of the *Romany Rye* who was a regular visitor to the tents and was accepted as an intimate, the Gypsies' friend, who, obviously, was privy to the rituals of their lives.

The obdurate reality which Gypsy researchers confront in the field time and again brings them to the conclusion that authentic Gypsy culture is on the brink of disappearing. This notion has in the meantime held them captive for a good century and a half and constitutes an important argument for their existence. For they feel called upon as archaeologists to collect the surviving relics of a centuries-old culture, to analyse but above all to preserve them, in the course of which they demonstrate a special interest in folklore: Gypsy motifs in art and literature, their songs and verses, magic rituals and religion, kinds of healing, apparel, music and dance. In addition the study of language variants has enjoyed continuing interest (with a burst of popularity during the last ten years) and articles appear with regularity in which the author makes known a previously lost text from the early Middle Ages in which reference is said to be made to the presence of Gypsies in, for example, Persia, Greece or Middle Europe. By now a small reference library full of books has been turned out about the origin of Gypsies and their first appearance in Europe. Whether all these inventories of words,

musical forms and customs rightly belong in one collection is a question which only a few ask themselves. As a rule Gypsy specialists concentrate on striking likenesses and have far less keen an eye for differences. Even more so they believe that the way of life of those who, to their way of thinking, do not belong to the true 'Gypsy race' has already in the distant past sullied the reputation of the whole category of itinerants. This turnabout in thinking about Gypsies was initiated by George Borrow and his heirs of the Gypsy Lore Society.

MIXED BLOODS AS THE ROOT OF EVIL

In the 1930s German eugenists added a biological component to the ethnic and social (dis)qualifications of nineteenth-century Gypsy specialists. An analysis of the work of youth psychiatrist and criminal biologist Robert Ritter (1901–51)¹⁷ concluded that he also took the idea of the true Gypsy as the prototypical nomad as a starting point. In his portrait of this practically mythological figure we recognize the traits which Grellmann had collected, but can discover an element as well stemming from the tradition in which 'natural' peoples are contrasted with 'cultured' ones. He compared them specifically with hunters and gatherers from prehistoric times who were said to be incapable of keeping pace with the forward march of civilization. The stagnation in their mental growth explains, as he sees it, their restive and parasitical behaviour; even their itinerancy he attributes to this prehistoric core. The socially unacceptable conduct of those with 'mixed blood' who came later was alleged to derive from their biological inheritance. Through relations across group lines, a gene for rootlessness made its way into the 'blood' of previously sedentary Germans. The biological legacy of the latter had in its turn seen to it that 'halfbloods' were more asocial and criminal than 'true Gypsies' because their potential for deviance was strengthened by their German cleverness and enterprising boldness. Relations between sedentary and non-sedentary peoples were, according to Ritter, invariably disadvantageous for both. The anxiety for contamination with inherited Gypsy characteristics was so strong that he wrote a single mixed match could stain the blood for many generations. Such notions of purity and a belief in the determinant force of the genetic underpinned all his research and, lest we forget, that of many of his European contemporaries.¹⁸

Ritter relied strongly on genealogical research, which brought to light that 90 per cent of the people who fell into his categories were partly of non-Gypsy descent. Most reports of Gypsy crimes, it was Ritter's conviction, unsupported by statistical evidence, involved this *Jenische Menschenschlag* that moved about like Gypsies. As early as 1934 Ritter had formed an idea of what Gypsy mixed-bloods – his preferred name for the category – were like. Throughout the coming years it would not undergo any change worth mentioning. From this product of a crossing of races, all the positive characteristics of the 'true Gypsy' seemed to be missing, while all those traits worthy of condemnation which people exhibited who were looked down on as socially inferior could be found. These people, he maintained – also in the eyes of 'true Gypsies' – were the roots of all evil.

To Ritter's way of looking at things, asociality was one of the most disadvantageous inherited characteristics of rovers. Only in the early 1940s would he declare the label to be applicable to a far larger category of people.¹⁹ Then in fact it became a collective designation for everyone, excluding the sick and invalided, who cost the community time, money and energy. Closer reading of his publications also discloses that in a certain sense he was constantly concerned with the same – in practice poorly demarcated – categories of people, whether writing about Gypsies, *Jenischen*, half-castes or marginal riff-raff, except that he was constantly shifting his perspective. The point of departure of his research on asociality in the 1930s (which, indeed, was not confined to Germany) was that many people hardly had any economic value for the community. The spotlight was accordingly turned on families and communities of paupers, recipients of the dole and the neglected. The concept of asociality in the first decades of the twentieth century became increasingly an expression of a kind of moral criterion. People who earlier were referred to as dishonourable or who were known as notorious good-for-nothings in these years became tagged as asocial. Since this was a word from a foreign language, it was replaced under the Nazis by such terms as *gemeinschaftsfremd* and *gemeinschaftsunfähig*.²⁰ In this context Ritter cited a ministerial decree from 18 July 1940 with guidelines for evaluating hereditary health. Herein *gemeinschaftsfremd* pertained to all persons with an inclination towards one form or another of condemnable behaviour (including psychopaths, addicts and troublemakers) whose nature precluded any possibility of amelioration. Ritter attributed five

attitudes towards society to these people which, one by one, he found fault with: they were weak, troublesome, destructive, recalcitrant and hostile.²¹ How he applied these in the execution of his research, he fails to mention.

One of the most important categories under the label *Gemeinschaftsfremden* was that of hereditarily tainted criminals, so-called born wrongdoers.²² They, too, according to Ritter, seldom came from a sedentary milieu. Usually they belonged to the ranks of the mentally less developed and the both economically and socially weaker members of society, which was also how he looked upon casual labourers. These people, it was his idea, had no steadfastness, but shifted about restively. The need to do research aimed specifically at this category, especially in wartime, was, according to Ritter, twofold. Society should be protected from dangerous characters and *Gemeinschaftsfremden*, and those fit to work and socially adjusted should be employed in places where their productivity was badly needed.²³ He did not assume, however, that the criminal type could be identified at a glance. He was of the opinion that contemporary research had rendered obsolete Lombroso's criminological-anthropological notions about atavism, the reversion of people to an (ancestral) state of primitiveness. He did not believe that someone's natural bent could be read from external features, proof that he had little confidence in physical anthropology. Only by analysing genealogically the hereditary circle of the criminal under scrutiny was it possible, Ritter found, to achieve results.²⁴ Although elsewhere he had remarked that how complex character traits were inherited was not yet known, in the genealogy of families he thought he could locate enough evidence to go on to stamp people with the mark of criminality.²⁵

Official criteria for distinguishing the categories of Gypsies, half-castes and gypsy-like groups were only established late on during the Nazi regime. In practice, for purposes of classification, for their indicators of choice the police authorities had for a long time already latched onto external appearance, way of life, language and names, in combination with occupations. From the time of Heinrich Himmler's decree of 16 December 1938 they saw themselves obliged to use as their point of departure the racial diagnoses which Ritter's institutes had drafted on grounds of genealogical data and the social evaluation of a person's individual family history. Not only the police authorities but also the Gypsies in question – if at any rate the term in this connection is still fitting – were, according to Ritter, informed of the results of the diagnosis and could contest it by

handing over genealogical documents with contradictory information. These racial diagnoses, known in German as *gutachtliche Ausserungen*, served as the basis for the selection of Gypsies and 'gypsy-like' individuals for Auschwitz,²⁶ but they have never been analysed because after the war they became scattered throughout Germany and to a large extent apparently lost. Remarkably, in February 1941 Ritter wrote that he had completed 10,000 of them, whereas it appears from the copies of racial diagnoses which we collected that on 8 July 1941 number 2,322 was written – the person in question was classified as ZM (+), that is to say a Gypsy with mixed blood of predominantly Gypsy descent. Under Ritter's responsibility racial diagnoses continued to be written out until January 1945, at which time number 24,411 was completed. In this instance diagnosis took into account a number of categories, although Ritter's publications leave us in the dark about what criteria were decisive. In any event the formal rubrication was as follows.²⁷

- (a) A Gypsy is someone who has three pure Gypsies among his grandparents.
- (b) A Gypsy half-caste (+) (first grade) is anyone with fewer than three pure Gypsies among his grandparents.
- (c) A Gypsy half-caste (–) (second grade) is anyone who has at least two Gypsy half-castes among his grandparents.
- (d) Non-Gypsy: all other cases.

The dramatic irony of this process was that Ritter, with his genealogical research on people labelled 'Gypsies' by the government, demonstrated that their ethnic identity was non-existent, at least in the primordial form which Grellmann had constructed. Consequently he felt obliged to break the all-embracing category down into a number of vaguely defined subcategories dominated in the first instance by that of the mixed population. They constituted, both for Ritter and for the Nazis whose policy he prepared, a defaturation of the racial purity of the German people, a view which engendered proposals for sterilization and, in a later phase, all but inevitably, deportation to Auschwitz.

THE DICTATES OF AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS

The manner in which down through the centuries Gypsies have been and still are defined at the governmental level demonstrates

a clear connection with changing notions of the process of categorization in science. The labelling of Gypsies as 'deviants' appears to have been subject to revision, which also holds true for the accompanying argumentation. It is far from evident to what extent the scientific construction of the Gypsy identity mirrored the (historical) existence of the different groups discernible behind the name. Although until the middle of the eighteenth century authoritative texts promulgated the definition used by governments in the implementation of their policies, after Grellmann a shift in that process came about. Since the publication of his historical survey, the ethnic element of 'the Gypsy people' has acquired a master status which entails a codification of the opposite characteristics. Judicial authorities in particular subsequently adopted his view of things and used it to legitimize their stigmatizing policy. There can be no mistaking this development when one traces the criminological tradition within Gypsy studies culminating in its criminal-biological variant during the Nazi era. In the practice of law enforcement, however, it did often prove difficult to base the combating of vagrancy or the limitation of possibilities for earning a living by means of an itinerant vocation on an ethnic categorization.

Thus since Grellmann academics and amateur scholars have played a vanguard role in the process of defining Gypsies. He has seen to it that the notion of a Gypsy people has become dominant and other group categories such as pilgrims, spies, criminal vagabonds, heathens and the mixed category of social outsiders have faded into the background. The 'people' concept appears to have meshed together so well with the founding myths of nineteenth-century nationalism that it remained in use even after evidence of integration (sedentarism, intermarriage, social mobility) kept gradually accumulating. That was true for governments but also for many experts on Gypsies. This leads us to the question of why scholarship with the passage of time has undergone so little essential change in its vision of Gypsies' history and way of life.

The most important explanation for such steadfastness is the tradition of imagery, the 'dictates of authoritative texts' or the 'family tree of ideas', as Said likewise puts forward in his inspiring study.²⁸ He shows how in the European process of exercising hegemony and domination one's own culture is constantly defined in terms of its opposite. Thus the identity of Europe is, for example, presented as the mirror image of 'the Orient', a designation for the other half of the world. Similar analyses are perpetrated in Western litera-

ture concerning America, 'Indians' and black populations in Africa.²⁹ Each image of another, so it appears, is always a reflection of a facet of the image of self. Said, to be sure, is not so much interested in imagery for its own sake as in the power relations of which imagery is an expression. He points out that writers on the Middle East, whom he groups together under the institutionalized collective term of Orientalists, have, through their texts, wielded definitional power over the people whom they describe. As a consequence a static cultural picture has come into existence of 'the Orient', which to a large extent obfuscates the historical identities of the inhabitants of Eastern countries. Ideas which have been formulated about Orientals, Said contends, correspond only in some small part with reality, for many administrative civil servants, adventurers, philologists and writers who spent some time in an Eastern country and then took up a pen closed ranks as a rule behind a tradition of 'authoritative texts' within which a Western image of the Orient held sway. We encounter a similar chain of events where Gypsy studies are concerned.

Already prior to Grellmann a historical canon of publications on Gypsies existed. Authors had primarily followed in each other's footsteps. This tradition of ongoing reproduction of the same sources and sentences did not undergo any demonstrable disruption with the appearance of Grellmann's study. In the final analysis his book is first and foremost a compilation of existing texts, a summary of the current state of knowledge on the subject. By combining a number of scientific traditions he introduced a fundamental change in how 'Gypsies' were defined but without disclosing any new sources about them. His interpretation of their history he derived from authoritative writers who, in their brief passages on the subject, had often based themselves on the chronicles of a century or longer ago. His ethnographic portrait of 'the essence' or 'the character' of Gypsies was likewise culled from the text of others and not his own observations. He continued the pattern of his predecessors and after him little changed in the situation, for Borrow and countless other authors also depended upon earlier texts on the subject and weighed their own experiences against what had been written. In this way it was practically inevitable for them to reach the conclusion that 'true Gypsies' hardly survived any longer, except for – and in this sense they constrained reality to suit their purposes – those whom they knew best, because of all Gypsies these in their eyes were (morally) the most pure. That process of identifying exceptions was

adopted by, for example, the poet Pushkin and Borrow, and also by Heinrich Himmler and Ritter with their 'racially pure' Gypsy families. The idea 'Gypsy' was thus preserved, while the actual Gypsies whom they came across continued to constitute a problem.

THE 'SPLENDID ISOLATION' OF GYPSY STUDIES

For anyone surveying the history of Gypsy studies, it is striking that practically all perspectives which have been developed still persist, each way of thinking with its own history and a strong claim to a right to exist. In the tradition of the Romantics, who have always emphasized that Gypsies are the most free of primitive peoples, the accepted line at present is that they live in resistance to the conformists' world. Evangelically inspired or other civilizing movements stress even today that Gypsies, as deprived outsiders living in pathetic conditions, require special attention. Folklorists carry on with their search for authentic traces of Gypsy culture with undiminished zeal, including linguists who have elevated *Romani*-philology to a special status. In judicial circles in the course of the twentieth century the criminological tradition in Gypsy studies has even expanded and become more intricately than ever entwined with government policy in a general sense, policy which even after the Second World War has remained strongly oriented to the promotion of assimilation within existing social structures. If in the past it was felt that Gypsies needed to be 'tamed', nowadays governments are intent on integrating them while assuring the preservation of their own (ethnic) identity as – at any rate in the West – policy jargon would put it. Although all these approaches may have their own motives for engagement with Gypsies, the image of the Gypsy has not lost any of its uniformity. Fascination with the Gypsies' life has endured, together with disapproval. In a certain sense they are romantic outcasts without equal.

The social isolation of Gypsies, together with the failure, until the 1970s, of special interest groups to tackle in an organized way existing prejudices or to occupy themselves with helping Gypsies to catch up, probably explain why historians never demonstrated much interest in their past. To the extent that there was interest it usually was complementary to the perspective of the governments then in power. Yet even historians who regarded their invariably biased sources critically do not for the most part appear to have

been capable of adding subtler shades of meaning to the one-sided picture presented there, a number of recent studies excepted. Scrutiny of Gypsy persecution under the Nazi regime has, to be sure, increased sharply, especially in Germany since the beginning of the 1980s. Virtually all the writers involved, however, a not inconsiderable proportion of whom have been commissioned by organizations which promote Gypsies' interests, similarly accept as their point of departure that Gypsies comprise one people, a folk which since their assumed departure from their homeland in India in the early Middle Ages have barely mingled with others and therefore have been able to maintain a character all their own. This is despite the fact that there are countless indications and pieces of evidence establishing that the term 'Gypsy' was applied in a number of instances rather generally by sitting governments, and certainly not simply to denote the ancestors of today's *Sinti* and *Roma*. The entanglement of science and politics on this (post-war) terrain has thus generated a number of analyses critical of government policy but at the same time it has confirmed some stereotypical ideas about the folk character of *the Gypsies*.

Another academic discipline whose absence from Gypsy studies has been sorely missed is social and cultural anthropology which has become institutionalized within universities since the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Not until long after the Second World War was any empirical anthropological fieldwork undertaken. Only guesswork is possible about the reasons for this omission. Was it true here as well that at the university level people simply did not consider the morals and customs, cultural manifestations and way of life of the Gypsy groups, recognized as marginal, worthy of serious study? Or is access to Gypsy groups for scientific research more difficult than access to other ethnic (minority) groups? Only folklorists have seemed to attach any value to what the members of a – for them – disappearing primitive people have left behind. The conclusion is even justified that Gypsy studies are actually only intensively pursued in these circles. That is likely to be one of the reasons why the field revels in such splendid isolation. Gypsy folklore, with its upgraded amateurism and, since 1888, its own journal, has always dominated the field. It was an enclave of enthusiastic 'Gypsy friends' who, in their longing for specialization, stuck to their own, delimited work terrain. They moved among like-minded spirits who shared practically identical ideas about how to approach their subject. As a result connections with historical and social

sciences were only established after the Second World War, and even then only on a modest scale. What hindered progress was a lack of reflection concerning historical sources. From whom, for example, must anthropology derive material for comparisons? There are hardly any reliable empirical studies available from either the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries and, what's more, most (partial) studies confined themselves to narrowly delineated groups in diverse countries about the extent of whose mutual ethno-historical ties nothing is known. The danger of unjustified generalizations still looms large as life.

According to Edward Said, Orientalism was only attacked and (in part) exposed for what it was once the decolonization of formerly oppressed peoples or nations had been achieved. Since for some Gypsy groups in Western European countries the process of emancipation has only commenced recently, hardly any reevaluation of extant historical knowledge has yet taken place. It remains questionable, moreover, whether corrections are to be anticipated from this corner since the intelligentsia in Gypsy circles are not likely to profit very much by challenging the core concepts of Gypsy studies. For political and pragmatic reasons they will sooner close ranks in support of the idea of a *collective* Gypsy identity, including a language which belongs to them. Recognition as an ethnic minority culminates, to be sure, in more agreements pertaining to specific rights. It will in part depend upon the choices made by Gypsy leaders and representatives to what extent and in what way the definition of Gypsies from above and the stigma it entails will be set right with all the social and political ramifications of such correction. However, this tentatively launched process may prove to develop further; until now practitioners of Gypsy studies appear to be preaching simply to their own parishioners. The study of the history of workers' groups and of women may now constitute recognized academic specialities, and social scientific studies of (ethnic) minorities may already have been burgeoning for years, but still the number of Gypsy studies incorporated within standard curricula has so far remained small. Only if isolation is shattered and a fundamental debate about the premises of Gypsy studies takes place in prestigious periodicals and is addressed to a broad academic public can we expect, perhaps, to arrive at a deeper understanding of the history of Gypsies in the future.

3 The Church of Knowledge: Representation of Gypsies in Encyclopaedias¹

Wim Willems and Leo Lucassen

A GENEALOGY OF IDEAS

In order to grasp the West European image of Gypsies during the last two hundred and fifty years, we have oral, iconographic and written sources at our disposal: surveys, sculpture, literature, magazines and newspapers which can tell us much about the norms, values and impressions of a society. These sources contain a wealth of information about people's ideas, their behaviour towards others and their internal relations. In this chapter we focus on one written source in particular: encyclopaedias.² We assume that they contain summaries of current information, and that they are written in more or less the same way. Because encyclopaedic information has always been seen as authoritative, we can use it to trace the prevailing opinions through time. The assumption is that encyclopaedias have played an important role in spreading a certain view of Gypsies, particularly among the upper-classes. The fact that the people who decided on the policies concerning them came from those ranks justifies the choice of encyclopaedias as a main source.

Because of the derived character of the entries in encyclopaedias, a study of the representation of Gypsies should also be concerned with the sources which have been used by the editors.³ After all, encyclopaedias function as a channel for the existing knowledge about Gypsies; they show what is considered the objective opinion of the moment. A critical examination of the sources is often left out by the editors. Consequently, both the prejudiced and non-prejudiced views belonging to a certain period can be deduced from the entries. The aim of this chapter is to set up a genealogy of ideas about Gypsies and to make a contribution to demythologize the stereotypes concerning them. We will show that certain stereotypical views tenaciously appear in encyclopaedias and scholarly works, while other views change at a certain point. We will try to provide

an explanation for both phenomena. A number of recurring themes in the sources, such as physical appearance, national character, morals and customs, religion, occupations and art, have been chosen as guidelines for the discussion.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The ideas about the physical appearance of Gypsies and the way these ideas have been put into words have hardly changed over the past two and a half centuries. In other words, a general feeling about the physical characteristics of the category 'Gypsies' exists, and what stands out is that the descriptions commonly used are fairly positive.⁴ The physical appearance of Gypsies compels admiration; the features which can be distinguished are all exemplary. According to many authors, depravity is a distinctive characteristic of the Gypsies, but there is no hint of this in the encyclopaedia descriptions of Gypsy physiognomy. This is particularly remarkable when we consider that certain branches of anthropology (namely phrenology and physiognomy) always emphasized the connection between man's inner self and his physical appearance.⁵ By means of scientific measurements and comparisons of skulls and faces, people thought to gain insight into the characters of nations and races. Anthropological sources were often used to support statements about the nature and the morals of Gypsies. Comparative linguistics was also used as a source, and this discipline, in its search towards the nature of language, was tempted into the kind of speculation which proved to be grist to the mill of later racists. In particular the work of Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), who for a long time thought that he had arrived at the essence of man by means of language classifications, encouraged the belief that something like an Aryan race existed, with Indian ancestors, interconnected by a common language. At the end of his life, he rejected this idea. He began to realize that the existence of Aryan languages does not necessarily imply that people who speak this language have the same (Aryan) ancestors. In this way, he saw to it that the Aryan myth was reconsidered. By that time, however, his ideas had already become widespread.⁶

The description of the physical appearance of Gypsies does not appear to be influenced by these ideas. The fascination with their exotic facial and physical characteristics created a portrait which

in some of its details is reminiscent of the Grecian ideal of beauty. However, we do not come across such positive descriptions in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. In those times, Gypsies were often described as frightening and hideous. A good example is provided by Münster's *Cosmographia Universalis* (1550). In the eighteenth century, the Gypsies' physical appearance was interpreted more positively, as in the Viennese journal *Anzeigen aus der sämtlichen Kaiserl. Königl. Erbländern* (1770-6), which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was used as a main source for an ethnographic portrait of Gypsies by Heinrich Grellmann. From this journal, the German founding father of Gypsy studies distilled a type of standard description, which has been adopted and in some points expanded upon by many later writers.

The encyclopaedias emulate their sources carefully, and this has resulted in the following image of Gypsies: mesocephalic skull (the normal 'European type'),⁷ raven hair, dark complexion, a high forehead, coal-black, lively eyes, a somewhat bent nose, a fine mouth with snow-white teeth, slender and flexible, olive skin (also dark or yellowish brown). One or two people mention a bronze-like skin; others think that the glow of the Gypsies' skin originates from the East. The girls have a somewhat lighter skin colour, and are generally found to be very attractive. However, it is often noted that their beauty is doomed to fade quickly. The idea that their dark skin colour is the result of their Eastern heritage has not always dominated. For instance, Grellmann posits that the Gypsies' skin colour, like that of the Laplanders, has to do with their way of life. Supposedly they do not wash themselves, and they constantly sit in the smoke from their fires: '... längst würde er aufgehört haben, negerartig zu sein, wenn er aufgehört hätte, zigeunerisch zu leben', is his conclusion.⁸ He did not connect skin colour with race, but with living conditions.

According to several nineteenth-century editors, the fact that Gypsies are well formed has also to do with their nomadic existence. The pure mountain air and the smell of herbs which they breathe supposedly give them the ability to survive all hardships and to reach, quite often, the ripe old age of 100. According to the same editors, there are no fat-bellied, hunchbacked, blind or lame Gypsies, and they are never ill.

NATIONAL CHARACTER

Judging by the ideal sculptured features of the Gypsies, one would never expect that their nature has been described in the most negative terms from the very beginning. They might be physically attractive, according to the views of the time, but they do not have the appropriate harmony of soul to match their physical appearance. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors provide a good example of how science managed, by way of language studies, to trace the origins of both the Gypsies and the West Europeans to India, only to argue, in an incredible manner amounting to wishful thinking, that the Gypsies have a pernicious nature, while the 'Aryans' have a noble nature. Before Rüdiger (1782) and Grellmann pointed out this Indian heritage, others had also tried to establish a relationship between the national character of the Gypsies and their supposed origin. For instance, in some quite scholarly writings during the eighteenth century, it was thought that Egypt was their place of origin. People tried to make this hypothesis acceptable by pointing out similar (usually negative) characteristics of the Egyptians. In this way, Swinburne suggested that Gypsies originated from the worshippers of Isis, who distinguished themselves by fortune-telling, a nomadic existence and thievery.⁹ Twiss saw a resemblance with Egyptian sorcerers, while Salmon, whose work has been translated into Dutch, lumped the Gypsies together with contemporary Egyptians.¹⁰ Apparently, the latter were stereotyped for their mendacity, for their lazy nature and for being thieves.

In 1724, when the first Dutch encyclopaedia appeared, people were already convinced that Gypsies were thieves who proved to be a great nuisance to the indigenous populations, and for that reason their persecution has been justified by different governments. However, the editors went no further than to present bits of superficial information. Once one had been led towards India, as mentioned before, via language studies, a scientific rationalization came into being which functioned as a source of negative views of Gypsies for more than two centuries. We saw that Grellmann based his notion of the Gypsy's Indian heritage on two factors: the first comprised comparative language studies which, according to him, indicated a strong affinity between the Romani language of the Gypsies and the Hindustani languages. The second factor originated from the in those days very popular travellers' journals which informed Grellmann about the existence of the caste of the Pariahs, whose

colour, build, character, morals and customs showed many similarities with the image he had of the Gypsies and their way of life.¹¹

Besides the caste of the Pariahs, another group supposedly lived in India. These people were hard-working, agrarian Aryans who were noted for their steadfast character (all the middle-class capitalistic virtues of the nineteenth century are included in this image). They left India at a time when Sanskrit was still spoken there and settled in Western Europe, distinguishing themselves positively from the Indians who stayed behind.¹² The Gypsies, however, supposedly left India and retained their national character, which was to be found in its purest form among the caste of the Pariahs, except that the Gypsies changed from a sedentary to a nomadic way of life. It is generally conceded that this nomadic way of life gradually took root in the Gypsies.

This analogy between the national character of the Gypsies and that of the Indian Pariahs dominated Gypsy studies until the twentieth century. This development probably contributed to the fact that in various encyclopaedias the character of the Gypsies has been described in terms which are remarkably similar. A number of characteristics stand out in the impression promulgated by the encyclopaedias and their sources. Gypsies are supposed, for example, to show a predilection for a life without ties, to prefer the *dolce far niente* (the sweetness of doing nothing) and to be prepared to put up with the worst consequences of their own attitude. These characteristics, along with many others, are, according to a range of authors, not only inherent in Gypsies, but also in the Eastern and Slavic nations. Popp Serboianu wrote that they are sly by nature and like all the Orientals supposedly live from day to day, not interested in the future.¹³ Thus, they are lazy and workshy. They will work only when forced by the utmost necessity. The workshy character of the Gypsies comprises one of the many constants in scholarly writings from the eighteenth century onwards. Once again, Grellmann is the great popularizer.¹⁴ According to him, Gypsies detest work, particularly when it requires an effort. They would rather submit to hunger and misery than improve their lot by working. Kogalnitchan (1837) completely agreed with that point of view.¹⁵ In his opinion, a Gypsy liked doing nothing at all and preferred stealing to working. More than a century after Grellmann's work, Wlislöcki, who presented himself as the protector of Gypsy culture, failed to change this view.¹⁶ Although this 'Gypsy expert' insisted on being without prejudices, because, unlike other observers, he had intensely involved

himself in the Gypsy world, it is remarkable that many of his descriptions are taken word for word from earlier authors.¹⁷

The general opinion is that Gypsies do not lack cleverness, but because of their upbringing and low morality, this characteristic usually develops into slyness. And this, in particular, helps them in stealing and committing fraud. They are trained from a very early age, and they subsequently develop a great dexterity in these skills. According to many authors, they usually operate on a small scale. This limitation is often explained by a reference to their cowardice. We can already observe this supposed characteristic in Grellmann's work. This author claims that Gypsies are afraid to commit robberies at night. Kogalnitchan explains this by referring to the centuries of Gypsy serfdom in the Balkans: 'Muth und Tapferkeit sind niemals das Erbtheil eines zum Sklaven herabgewürdigten Menschen.'¹⁸ That Gypsies limit themselves mainly to small burglaries is seldom appreciated as a positive point. It is always the negative characteristics (cowardice, inability to think) which prevent them from committing larger crimes.¹⁹

Because Gypsies (generally) are supposed to lack notions of morality, they would allow their instincts to rule them more easily, have no sense of honour, are greedy, wasteful, intemperate with food and drink, lecherous and frivolous. However, the opinions concerning their loose morals vary considerably. For some these are beyond questioning.²⁰ For instance, Twiss claimed that all Spanish female Gypsies practised prostitution. Borrow, however, some fifty years later, emphasized the chastity of the Spanish Gypsies.²¹ Then again, a century later Popp Serboianu claimed that Gypsies have absolutely no sexual control; according to him, the Gypsies' love life solely constituted an indulgence in sensuality.²² Block (1936) did not support this claim.²³ He argued that while Gypsy women may look sensual, this says nothing of their inner nature. Because they are a primitive people, the outward appearance and behaviour (dancing) of the women apparently do not excite Gypsy men in the way civilized men would be. It is only when modern anthropological research developed that the supposed licentiousness of the Gypsies was proved to be a fable.²⁴ Further it seems to be undisputed that Gypsies are rough and uncivilized, which has led to the following standard description in nineteenth-century encyclopaedias: 'Although they have lived among Christian people for centuries, they have not cast off their heathendom, and they have remained rude and uncivilized, attached to a nomadic existence, making do

with sober and sometimes disgusting food in miserable huts.'²⁵

A number of characteristics which are inferred from these sources are mendacity, disloyalty and cruelty towards animals. Moreover, the Gypsies supposedly lack courage and bravery, and they are faint-hearted.²⁶ This cruelty, which is also directed at people, has generated prolific writings. What particularly seems to have encouraged this view is that from the fifteenth century onward Gypsies were hired as executioners in Romania and Hungary. Borrow later adds a horrible story which enforces this particular image:²⁷ an old man is tortured by Gypsies, who rub fresh peppers into his eyes in order to find out where he has hidden his money. Even the French professor Bloch repeated this story in the 1950s without comment, even though he pleaded for more understanding for the group.²⁸

The attributed thievish nature of the Gypsies, which only disappeared from the Dutch encyclopaedias after the Second World War (and even then not completely) raised fears of moral degeneration in late nineteenth-century thinking as well as in the first half of the twentieth century. Inspired by the work of the Dutch orthodox Christian statesman Abraham Kuyper *Om de Oude Wereldzee* (1907/8), the Christian encyclopaedias in particular emphasized that the heathenish and amoral behaviour of the Gypsies was dangerously contagious: 'Their influence on several nations in Europe manifested itself in the cultivation of banditry, in the encouragement of superstition and fortune-telling, and in a spirit of cunning and guile.'²⁹ Even though this passage indicates religious intolerance only, the idea of degeneration had far-reaching consequences for the concept of race, which was first worked out by physical anthropologists and later shamelessly exploited by the Nazis. In actual practice it became clear that authors obsessed by purity are at the same time fixated on the lack of it. That was definitely the case with anthropological and especially the eugenic research on the 'Gypsy race', as we showed in the previous chapter. In the course of the nineteenth century, people began to distinguish between the naturally 'pure Gypsies' and the mixed forms. In this respect, it is remarkable that before the breakthrough of the idea of race (in the second half of the nineteenth century), people were convinced that nothing would be more preferable than to mix Gypsies with Europeans. According to this line of thought, the nomadic character of the Gypsies would then automatically disappear. Taking away children from their parents, must also have been seen in this light. Upbringing rather than race or heredity was looked upon as a determining factor.³⁰

Anthropometrical research, which concerns the measurements and proportions of the human body, was one of the factors which particularly influenced the development of the concept of race. Pittard studied Gypsies in the Balkan countries and in Hungary because they were supposedly the purest race of European Gypsies. In his report in 1908/9, he noted that the Gypsies had mingled with all kinds of people. Supposedly, the Scandinavian and north Germanic Gypsies in particular originated partly from native drifters. In several countries Gypsies could be found among the 'normal' travelling folk. He therefore concluded that the Gypsies did not belong to the Hindu-type and that a mixed heritage (from the 'original population' in India) should be assumed. The dichotomy between 'original' and 'mixed', which is often related to nomadism and a sedentary life, prevailed until the 1940s. References to a mixed heritage and to the Aryan race did not disappear from the Dutch entries concerning Gypsies until 1953.

MORALS AND CUSTOMS

It is almost inevitable that the extended description of the Gypsy character, which is already marked by a complete lack of values, does not show the morals and customs of the Gypsies in a favourable light. Even after the Second World War, the encyclopaedias propagated ideas like 'once a thief, always a thief' and stated that those who live off society like parasites cannot, by definition, have enviable manners or cultural traditions. That the Gypsies are different is emphasized again and again, and the opinion which plays underneath is that they are a peculiar people. No stone is left unturned when it comes to proving that they are barbarians. According to the most contemporary views, they may have been unjustly persecuted and oppressed, but that does not take away the fact that they are deviants whose function, particularly in modern society, is unclear.

If we examine the way people perceived the social organization of the Gypsies through the centuries, we observe that eighteenth-century ideas on the subject were fairly romantic. Later, it is continually pointed out that they travel in bands of 200 to 300 people. Each tribe is headed by a chosen leader, called the *raj*. He is the highest judge and represents the tribe to the outside world. He decides the direction in which the tribe travels, and he allocates a

travelling area to each extended family. The editors have always been fascinated by Gypsy titles. For instance, the *Volkenkundige* (Ethnographical) *Encyclopedie* of 1962 points out that more or less related groups have a queen, an idea which became popular in the nineteenth century. It is not until 1976 that the *Grote Winkler Prins* indicated that while the outside world refers to a king or queen, the Gypsies themselves reject these titles as incorrect. Jan Yoors, an artist who grew up in Antwerp, travelled with a Lowara Gypsy group for more than ten years from the age of twelve. In his books, written in the postwar period, he described the other side, based on his own experiences, and he too rejected those titles. He did concede that the Gypsy communities do present certain members as kings, but he also mentioned that these kings mainly function as lightning rods during conflicts with the *gaze* (non-Gypsies).

The dietary habits of Gypsies are also seldom left out. Most editors feel that they must first point out that Gypsy cooking is disgusting. They apparently enjoy vegetables like onions and garlic the most. Usually it is added that this habit is in accordance with Eastern customs. Although they usually live on bread and water (according to the 1912 *Winkler Prins*), they do not scorn fat meat, game or pork. One editor mentions that the hedgehog is a national dish for the Gypsies, while another notes that they even eat dogs, cats, rats and mice. Moreover even some twentieth-century works claim that Gypsies particularly like the meat of dead animals. Some, like Borrow, went even further and were convinced that Gypsies use their knowledge of medicine in order to deliberately cause cattle diseases and even poison animals; subsequently, they would visit the farmers in order to pick up the cadavers. Borrow admitted that this allegation was based largely on rumour, but in view of the Gypsies' nature, he thought there was a high probability that it was true.³¹ Others claimed that Gypsies dig up dead animals in order to eat them later. For example, Schwicker was informed that Gypsies in Temesvar had to be kept away from a dead horse by soldiers, but 'die Zigeuner gruben es später dennoch heraus und verzehrten es'.³² The American author and folklorist Leland pointed out that the Indian Pariahs hang on to the same custom.³³

Often, a direct connection between eating cadavers and cannibalism is inferred. The most notorious accusation of Gypsy cannibalism dates from 1782, when 200 of them were suspected of it. After being tortured by the villagers, some of them confessed, and 49 Gypsies had already been executed (partially beheaded, partially

hung, then put on the rack and quartered) when an official investigations committee arrived, sent there by Kaiser Joseph II. The committee soon discovered that the confessions must have been false, because the supposed victims were still alive.³⁴ However, the fascination with this type of excess remained so intense that it overshadowed any notion of disbelief. Although the accusation of cannibalism was first heard of around 1629 in Spain, little attention was paid to the matter outside that country. Only after Borrow quoted the Spanish source on cannibalism, Quinones (1632), do we find it in other works.³⁵ For central and northwest Europe, the allegation probably started at an earlier date. Most students in Gypsy studies refer to the famous Hungarian trial in 1782. Grellmann, the first author to mention this trial, even wrote that he had no knowledge of older accusations.³⁶ The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed sporadic accusations of cannibalism, but only a few authors really believe them. In recent studies, as far as we know, only Serboianu was convinced that Gypsies are indeed cannibals. Block, who referred to the same trial, dismissed the allegations as a fable.³⁷

Child-stealing is often mentioned in one and the same breath with the allegation of cannibalism. The idea proves to be tenacious, for even in *Oosthoek's* 1940 encyclopaedia (Z-885) the following is found: 'Accusations of child-stealing and even (mutual) cannibalism repeatedly lead to persecution in the 19th and 20th century; however, these accusations were *seldom* substantiated' (emphasis added). This standard phrase changes only in later editions, after the Second World War, and then it becomes: 'The child-stealing allegations continually proved to be mere insinuations.' It is remarkable that Grellmann, who usually opted for the most negative interpretation, rejected the allegations of both child-stealing and cannibalism. Influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, he considered these allegations as signs of superstition and irrational thinking.³⁸ The opinions of Borrow and Serboianu are directly opposed to this.³⁹ The former claimed that Gypsies stole children in order to sell them, and Serboianu thought that these children were mutilated in order to turn them into beggars. Block's view of the matter differed completely. According to this author, Gypsies stole white children because of a 'Selbsterhaltungstrieb der Zigeuner als Rasse.'⁴⁰ In this way, degeneration of the Gypsy race would be prevented.

The marital traditions of the Gypsies have also generated the wildest speculations. To many, the abduction of the bride, the incestuous conduct and unchristian marriage rituals which are attri-

buted to the Gypsies are a thorn in the side. It would definitely be interesting to find out when accusations of incest started to be projected on Gypsy societies and what arguments were used, for the imagination of many a scholar has been richly stimulated by this subject.

We will not go into the Indian origins of Romany, the generic term for all Gypsy dialects. This consideration is not important to the image of Gypsy. What we wish to consider summarily is a claim which is first made in the 1938 *Winkler Prins* encyclopaedia that, besides their colloquial language, the Gypsies had developed a sign language which they used while on the road in order to inform the groups following them about the best route, the behaviour of the police, the well-being of the inhabitants, and so on. As far as we know, Avé-Lallemant was the first to note the supposed influence of the Gypsy language on secret sign languages.⁴¹ In his influential work about the German criminal, the Gypsies are equated to thieves without the slightest mitigating nuance. Because of this, the author thought that there was a connection between the German word for scoundrel (*Gauner*) and the word *Zigeuner* (Gypsy). The latter term is supposedly a collocation of *Zieh* (roam or wander) and *Gauner*.⁴² In the second half of the century the secret sign language of the Gypsies became an increasingly popular theme, particularly in German criminology. Liebich went into great detail on the subject, and the authoritative criminologist Lombroso, who maintained a very negative view of the Gypsies in his works, also referred to their secret sign language.⁴³ Later, the work of these authors on the subject was worked out in great detail by Gross.⁴⁴ According to him, the Gypsies used the signs mainly to facilitate their criminal activities such as theft, murder and so on. This negative interpretation did not diminish until long after the Second World War.

RELIGION

From the eighteenth century up to today, encyclopaedias have insisted that Gypsies are not religious, at least not in the true sense of the word. They might appear to follow the way of Christ in Christian countries, and to be Mohammedans in Islamic countries, but according to the editors, they do this only for opportunistic reasons, such as gaining access to a particular country. In addition, it is noted that they never bother about religious concepts, religious

education or customs,⁴⁵ except for – and no encyclopaedia fails to emphasize this – their alleged custom of having a newborn child baptized as often as possible in order to get a fair number of gifts from the various godparents. Taking into account the negative view of the Gypsies, it is not surprising that baptism for money and presents has always been interpreted as proof of begging and fraud. Besides the question of how widespread this custom actually was, a critical remark is especially justified here, particularly because this so-called custom is often mentioned in order to illustrate how undesirable Gypsies were in earlier times (as well as today). We can find a good example of such a negative interpretation in van Kappen's dissertation on the early history of Gypsies in the Netherlands.⁴⁶ The author is convinced that Gypsies had their children baptized mainly for the sake of the presents from the godparents. He bases his conclusion on the decisions of various synods of the Dutch Reformed Church at the beginning of the seventeenth century. These synods imposed injunctions which were not against baptizing Gypsy children, but against petitions for godfathers and godmothers. Van Kappen sees this as proof that multiple baptisms did occur and that society found this objectionable. At the same time, he shows that such injunctions did not prevent the rural population from giving the Gypsies money after a baptism ceremony.⁴⁷ If we also take into account that the injunctions against godparenthood were circumvented, one can conclude just as easily that the Gypsies were not as unwanted as was supposed earlier, particularly where the rural population was concerned.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, opinions concerning the Gypsies' official beliefs changed in scholarly writings; they might have been religious in only a superficial way, but it could not be denied that they had religious feelings. Kogalnitchan was the first who presented us with this idea.⁴⁸ Later, the same idea was worked out in much greater detail by Liebich, Schwicker and Wlislöcki (1891). Wlislöcki in particular examined all kinds of creation myths, fairy tales, superstitions, magic and such. In the twentieth century this theme has been elaborated upon in various ways.⁴⁹ Around the turn of the century the realization that Gypsy communities have certain religious ideas and customs slowly starts to penetrate the encyclopaedias. Nevertheless, the Christian encyclopaedias are always quick to note that the fundamental principles of the Gypsies are inspired by heathendom and atheism. The *Oosthoek* mentions that Gypsy customs concerning their oldest woman are indicative of

ancient religious ideas. The fact that some foods are forbidden (horse flesh in particular), that there are declarations of impurity (of their midwives, among others) and that certain trees and animals are worshipped point towards the same conclusion. According to the *Oosthoek*, the Gypsies' ancestor worship originates from fear of the dead. It is not until 1976 that the *Grote Winkler Prins* reports that this type of worship has a central function in the religious experience of the Gypsies. During this century, the emphasis has been more and more on the alleged superstitious beliefs of the Gypsies.

PROFESSIONS

In many studies about Gypsies – and the same holds true for encyclopaedias – two contradictory views can be found on their vocational activities: because of their specialized professions, Gypsies have always played a unique role in the labour market, for instance as tinkers or sieve-makers; and, conversely, Gypsies are extremely workshy and hardly ever work. Most authors do not seem to be aware of this contradiction. Nevertheless, logically one of the views must be untenable. After all, it is impossible to master a manual profession to the finest detail without long-term training and instruction.

In the eighteenth century, people already seemed to be convinced that Gypsies preferred jobs which required little effort,⁵⁰ and above all no permanent residence (see the 1940 *Oosthoek*). In view of the prevailing impression of the Gypsy character, this interpretation is hardly surprising. In addition, attempts have been made to categorize Gypsies according to group or tribe, on the basis of descent and according to their way of life. For example, *Nieuwenhuis'* 1844 encyclopaedia divides the so-called Kroon-Ciganen into four groups: Rudari, mainly goldwashers; Ursari, who are well known as bearleaders; Lingurari, who make wooden utensils (especially spoons); and Laïessie, who roam around without practising a real profession. This last group in particular is described in a negative fashion. In addition, the author distinguishes the Batrassi, slaves of the Bojars, Romanian landed gentry. The Gypsies have supposedly become sedentary and are active in all kinds of professions. Many passages indicate with little subtlety that even these Gypsies cannot escape the blemish of their heritage.

The element of fraud is brought in consistently in discussions of the horse trade. *De Chalmot* even suggests that this was an important cause of the government's negative attitude towards Gypsies. The way people perceived the role of Gypsies in horse trading provides a good illustration of the premise stated in the beginning of this section. The illegalities which pervaded this market must have been taken as a matter of course probably because inflating prices or trickery must have been part of horse trading and every dealer, Gypsy and non-Gypsy, must have operated in that way. Otherwise one cannot explain why, through the centuries, people continued to buy horses from Gypsies. However, no one bothers about this contradiction in scholarly literature until after the Second World War. Such inconsistencies easily found their way into the negative interpretation of the Gypsy lifestyle. The explanation of fraud in the horse-trading business usually pointed towards the backwardness of the farmers who were tricked again and again. In addition, it was claimed that the psychological qualities of the Gypsy played a decisive role. He supposedly sensed how a potential buyer was to be approached.⁵¹

Many other professions worthy of closer examination are mentioned in the encyclopaedias, but for the sake of brevity, these must be passed over. What does need to be mentioned is that almost every encyclopaedia reports that Gypsies visited markets and fairs yearly in order to perform as acrobats, magicians, dancers and musicians (once again, occupations which require highly developed skills), while the older women foretold the future by reading cards and palms. Particularly this chiromancy, predicting the future by reading the lines of a human hand, has always appealed to the imagination. The encyclopaedia of *Witsen Geysbeek* (1861) even claims that the old Gypsy women were not afraid to resort to murder in order to make their predictions come true.

ART

The only appreciation which the Gypsies have really gained has been in the area of art. However, this appraisal is often presented in the form of an indestructible stereotype: the Gypsy's fiery temperament combined with his musical virtuosity, expressing his unbridled existence. Up to the twentieth century, the folkloristic side of the Gypsies' means of expression has been highlighted. For instance,

we read that Gypsy dancers were held in high regard in Russia. Indeed, there are even examples of distinguished gentlemen who asked such gifted Gypsy girls to marry them. The improvisational talent of the Hungarian and Balkan Gypsies, mostly on the violin, in particular has generated many exhaustive descriptions. For instance, the *Algemene Muziek Encyclopedie* of 1963 (and 1984) relates the anecdote of Bihari, a Gypsy violinist, who was praised highly by Liszt in 1821 for his virtuosity: This violinist had a servant carry his violin in front of him on a satin pillow; the most beautiful moment of his life occurred when he moved Queen Elisabeth of Hungary to tears with his playing.

In the 1930s, when music encyclopaedias begin to focus on the characteristics of Gypsy music, it starts to be emphasized that the Gypsy, rather than being creative, often copies and reproduces, which although particularly noticeable in his music extends to other activities as well. The explanation goes as follows: Gypsies in central or northwest Europe have been displaying their arts and crafts at fairs since the fifteenth century, capturing the citizenry's interest in music, dance and magic. They partially took over the role of wandering acrobats and jugglers, and gave the ancient profession of the musician a new unprecedented exotic flavour by singing in a strange language with grace-notes, trills and timbres which are undeniably Asian. This view also argues that the musicians preferred to concentrate on and adapt to local melodies and rhythms for commercial reasons. That is why Gypsy music is seen more as a specific way of performing, a style of singing and playing that already exists among the local population, rather than as an indigenous music which belongs to the tradition brought along by the travelling musicians themselves. Indeed, this is the way they entered European history, as itinerant musicians, socially abused, but much admired as musical craftsmen (*Grote Winkler Prins*, 1979, Part XX). On the one hand then, there is a laudatory emphasis on the fact that all Gypsy music has an expressive vitality in common, and that Gypsies saw to it that the Spanish flamenco was handed down. On the other hand, it is claimed again and again, particularly during the past few decades, that they do not possess an original musical culture.

A similar development can be observed in ideas about the literary traditions of Gypsies. In 1906, *Vivat's* illustrated encyclopaedia managed only to report that there were poets among the Gypsies, and with that we have the first encyclopaedia to mention this aspect.

One of the first students in Gypsy studies who examined Gypsy fairy tales and songs was the Austrian linguist Miklosich (1875). After him, Schwicker praised the poetry and the narrative skills of Gypsies, deviating for the first time from his shining example, Liebich, who found their poetry 'dürftig und armselig'.⁵² Wlislöcki must also be named as a great animator and popularizer in this branch of studies.⁵³ This author, who was more blinded than enlightened by his observations (only partly through participation), left the beaten track at this point and collected many folk-tales, songs, poems and fairy tales from Gypsies.⁵⁴

In 1923, the *Oosthoek* encyclopaedia, which apparently had learned little and was badly informed on contemporary literature, wrote that Gypsies did not have a literary tradition. In the second edition in 1932 an addition was made: '... except for fairy tales and stories which display little that is special'. And suddenly, in the fourth edition in 1953, the Gypsies are seen as musical, cheerful, lively people, with a talent for reciting arts, crafts and languages. Moreover, they have a treasury of Eastern fairy tales and songs which is of utmost importance. The role of Gypsies as storytellers with a repertoire of hundreds of legends and other folk-tales also comes into focus in the 1970s. The 1979 *Grote Winkler Prins* is even the first to devote a long section to the popular literature of Gypsies. However, the Gypsy's originality is denied again. There is talk of imitation and a mixture of motifs and subjects of foreign origins without Indian traces, which are adapted to become completely gypsy-like. Texts of the Gypsies retain, as it were, the sediment of the cultures which they have encountered during their travels. Essentially, this attempt at appreciation proves to be yet another negative interpretation, because little justice is done to the merits of Gypsy culture.

CONCLUSIONS

The question as to the source of the representation of Gypsies in (Dutch) encyclopaedias, which we raised in the introduction, can be answered very simply. The knowledge upon which this representation is based is taken straight from the scholarly works which existed at the time. Whatever is presented in these works is adopted without criticism from the original source. Grellmann's work in particular has had a pivotal function. This does not apply to the

first two encyclopaedias, one by Luiscius (1724–34) and one by Hübner (1748), whose fairly short entries were based upon sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chronicles. After De Chalmot (1789), who based his entry of 16 columns entirely on Grellmann, the tone is set for a long time.

It was Grellmann who believed he had demonstrated that Gypsies were an untrustworthy, childish people, who could only reach a degree of higher civilization through careful guidance. The rationalizations which he presented in his work began to lead a life of their own as stereotypes, and were soon used to justify attacks by society which were launched on several fronts. Later works, in which Grellmann's prejudices were continued, produced practically the same images. Even those who wished the Gypsies well, who thought they could rid themselves of their prejudices by travelling and living with them like Wlislöcki and Block, did not manage to escape the impressions which had been handed down. At times, people went even further and interpreted an initially positive impression in a negative way at the last moment. We can see this mechanism in operation very clearly in the representation of the musical talents of Gypsies. Although they are praised for the virtuosity of their performances, particularly in the nineteenth century, once musicology, and subsequently the encyclopaedias, took a critical look at their repertoire, it was soon 'demonstrated' that their music totally lacked originality, and that its nature was reproductive rather than creative. The same supposedly went for their oral tradition, whose imitative character was continually emphasized. Leaving aside the question of whether 'imitation' and 'originality' are valid concepts in this context, as they quickly lead to the argument of the chicken and the egg, it must be noted that other performing arts and folk-tales never have to answer to such requirements.

Encyclopaedias are generally distinguished from scholarly works by the outdated concepts and representations which continue to appear in them. Editors are slow in accepting recent studies, particularly those which deviate from the norm, such as the social-scientific research from about 1960 onwards which concentrates on the marginal and minority position of Gypsies.⁵⁵ An extreme example is found in the Christian (1929, 1961, 1977) and Catholic (1955, 1983) encyclopaedias in the Netherlands. These hold tenaciously to the work that the Dutch political leader Abraham Kuyper wrote around the turn of the century and in which he was exceptionally negative about Gypsies, Jews and 'the Asian danger'. The

encyclopaedia *Thieme* from 1984 proves that outdated views are not limited to encyclopaedias with a religious character. *Thieme* presents a number of backward ideas about Gypsies which we do not find in the recent editions of encyclopaedias such as *Oosthoek*, *Spectrum* and the *Winkler Prins*. These encyclopaedias emphasize, at least from the 1960s onward, the Gypsies' position as a discriminated minority through the ages.

Part II

Stigmatization and Government Policies